

Message Text

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ACTION PM-03

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ERDA-05

ACDA-05 OMB-01 /062 W
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R 242115Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9383

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

CINCPAC

SECDEF WASHDC

CNO WASHDC

CINCPACFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 783

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR PFOR NZ

SUBJECT: NUCLEAR POWERED WARSHIP (NPW) VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND

REF WELLINGTON 0658

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER ROWLING HAS INFORMED THE
AMBASSADOR THAT GNZ IS UNLIKELY TO MAKE A DECISION ON
AMERICAN NPW VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND BEFORE THE END OF 1975.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE AMBASSADOR ON MARCH 11 PRESENTED AN AIDE MEMOIRE TO
PM ROWLING RE ABSOLUTE USG LIABILITY (REFTEL) FOR CLAIMS
ARISING OUT OF NUCLEAR POWERED WARSSHIP INCIDENTS. THE
PRIME MINISTER'S (INTERIM) RESPONSE IS IN FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH:

2. "MY DEAR AMBASSADOR,
"I PROMISED YOU A RESPONSE ON THE QUESTION OF VISITS
BY NUCLEAR POWERED VESSELS WHICH WE DISCUSSED WHEN YOU
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CALLED ON ME ON 11 MARCH. AT THAT TIME YOU DREW ATTENTION

TO THE RECENTLY ENACTED UNITED STATES LEGISLATION WHICH PROVIDES THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL HANDLE CLAIMS ARISING FROM A NAVAL REACTOR INCIDENT ON THE BASIS OF ABSOLUTE LIABILITY.

"I RECOGNISE THAT THIS IS AN IMPORTANT UNDERTAKING ON THE PART OF THE UNITED STATES AND ONE WHICH WILL BE WELCOME TO YOUR PARTNERS. I HAVE ASKED THAT THE APPROPRIATE OFFICIALS SHOULD LOOK AT THE QUESTION AGAIN IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW LEGISLATION. AS YOU WILL UNDERSTAND, A NUMBER OF DEPARTMENTS ARE INVOLVED AND IT WILL BE NECESSARY FOR THEM TO HAVE CONSULTATIONS BEFORE THEY ARE READY TO PROVIDE THE ADVICE ON WHICH THE GOVERNMENT WILL MAKE ITS FINAL DECISION. I DO NOT EXPECT THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THIS ISSUE BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR.

"I SHOULD ADD THAT WHILE THE CHANGE IN UNITED STATES POLICY CERTAINLY SEEMS TO HAVE REMOVED ONE OF THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH WE HAVE ENCOUNTERED WHEN CONSIDERING THIS ISSUE IN THE PAST MY COLLEAGUES AND I WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE ANXIETY OF THE NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THE VISIT OF A NUCLEAR POWERED VESSEL WILL, DESPITE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PROPULSION AND ARMAMENT, GIVE RISE TO QUESTIONS ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS, WHICH WILL BE HARD TO ANSWER.

"YOU MAY BE ASSURED THAT WE SHALL GIVE THE FULLEST CONSIDERATION TO ALL ANGLES OF THE QUESTION.

"YOURS SINCERELY, (S) W E ROWLING"

3. COMMENT: IN EFFECT, THE PRIME MINISTER IS SAYING THAT NO SUBSTANTIVE NEW ZEALAND REPLY ON NPW VISITS CAN BE EXPECTED UNTIL AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTIONS NEXT NOVEMBER. THIS WAS TO HAVE BEEN EXPECTED IN A NATION WHERE ANYTHING NUCLEAR AUTOMATICALLY TRIGGERS A NEGATIVE REACTION, AND PARTICULARLY IN AN ELECTION YEAR.

OUR NEW LIABILITY LAW GIVES US AT LEAST SOME GROUNDS
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FOR HOPE THAT A POSITIVE DECISION ON NPW VISITS MAY BE FORTHCOMING AFTER NOVEMBER 1975. THE ULTIMATE DECISION HERE WILL BE AFFECTED NEGATIVELY OR POSITIVELY BY WHAT AUSTRALIA DOES. REALISTICALLY, HOWEVER, WE SHOULD RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT WE ARE BY NO MEANS OUT OF THE WOODS ON NPW VISITS, AS THE PM'S RAISING OF THE NUCLEAR WEAPONS SPECTER INDICATES. BEHIND ALL THIS IS THE UNFORTUNATE FAILURE OF NEW ZEALAND TO PERCEIVE A CREDIBLE EXTERNAL

THREAT.
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